

Questions Submitted for Town Hall

1. In our conversations around housing and even things like public meetings for permits, how do we make sure to include people who have less access to the process, like young parents, immigrants who may have a language barrier, people who are working two jobs to pay rent, and people unfamiliar with the nuances of zoning laws? How can we make sure that people who have barriers to being heard are being included? (Jill McIntyre Witt)
2. Is there a way to prevent landlords from discriminating against people who have housing assistance, such as Veteran Assisted Housing Vouchers (VASH) or Section 8 Housing Vouchers, as well as individuals or families that are on a fixed income, such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) or Social Security? If so, will renters be assured they won't be discriminated against based on their source of income and what would that look like? (April McCabe)
3. What will you do in our housing/zoning policies to prevent the rapid increases in rent that are impoverishing our community, to the point that many can't afford health care, healthy food, and other necessities, as well as causing more of our neighbors to become homeless? (Hannah Fishman)
4. What about doing the same as Seattle and make Section 8 a protected status? (Alan Krum)
5. Seattle also requires new complexes to allocate some units to low income and Section 8. Often the amount of those allocated units is increased by Seattle due to a zoning variance trade off. What does Bellingham do? (Alan Krum)
6. You cannot just rely on developers to build what we need here out of the goodness of their hearts, especially these days. Have you considered something like rent control / limited increases? It works somewhat well in NYC and other places and if we don't get this situation dealt with, soon nobody but the tech types from Seattle will be able to live here anymore. (I can say that. I'm a retired Director of IT, just now somewhat disabled and with no money left.) (Alan Krum)
7. What is the best way to bring jobs into Bellingham that will keep our educated young people from leaving town while also giving them places to live that are affordable to live? (Joel Wilcox)
8. When are City and County government agencies going to make it easier for developers to actually develop housing? All of your regulations simply add on to the regulatory cost of these

builders/developers, which are then passed on to us, the consumers, resulting in higher rent and house prices. Furthermore, all of the bureaucratic red tape just restricts potential developers from even entering the market due to barriers of entry that derive from these regulatory/transaction costs, so the City and County are essentially choking off a potential supply of new entrants into the market, therefore stifling supply and creating disequilibrium in the housing market, which results in higher prices. (Joel Stamm)

9. How can we use our housing policy to combat climate change and protect future generations? What kinds of housing options are most energy efficient and why? How can we apply those in Bellingham to create more affordable housing as well as bikeable and walkable communities? (Rheanna Johnston)

10. Do we have data that shows us where the infill toolkit is currently being applied in Bellingham, and what housing density looks like in different neighborhoods? How do we make sure our housing policy ensures that every kid in Bellingham has an equal opportunity at a quality education, instead of having 'good' schools and 'bad' schools? (Galen Herz)

11. Everyone acts on the assumption that more housing equals more affordable housing but I have not seen any proof this is true. Do you have support for this? What I see is that new housing commands a premium price, and then that is used to determine the price of housing per square foot when homes in the area are sold, so that the cost of housing overall goes up. And no one appears to be accounting for the fact that we are running out of buildable land. Demand is up and supply is down. How do you get affordable housing out of that? What solutions do you see? I would like to see more subsidies to low and middle income people rather than developers. And why do we ask housing applicants their income, but we do not ask builders their profit margins when awarding subsidies? (Wendy Harris)

12. One issue I have never seen addressed regarding infill and increased density are the public health and safety impacts that are associated. Traffic fumes and wood smoke are the no. 1 environmental health risks for Whatcom County residents. There are also increases in noise and light and loss of privacy that have psychological and physical impacts. We cannot pretend that it is all good. It seems clear, to me at least, that more density is going to require more regulation and more mitigation but I have not seen any willingness by the city to address this. I cannot support greater population density until these issues are addressed and I have some ideas of what to do, but I would love to hear the panel and member of the city address this. I would also suggest a multiple stakeholder taskforce be formed to look into some of these issues. (Wendy Harris)

13. What incentives can City of Bellingham provide for condominiums downtown (market rate & affordable)? Condos would be a great way to provide infill close to jobs and services but none are being built due to limited bank financing. Are there things the City can do to help mitigate the risk to builders? (Dean Fearing)

14. As neighborhoods updated their Neighborhood Plans, several removed zoning that allowed for multi-family housing opting instead for single-family zoning. What can the city do to add multi-family zoning to areas zoned single-family that would encourage innovative housing types? (Dean Fearing)

15. The City of Bellingham just released a list of surplus property the City currently owns. Is the City willing to work with affordable housing developers to sell or give that land for affordable housing projects? (Dean Fearing)

16. What incentives can the COB build into funds it invests into homeless and transitional housing services to encourage providers to create a path to homeownership? Though not appropriate for everyone, owning a Habitat home (with a mortgage of \$350.00 a month) is more economical and sustainable than renting. (John Moon)

17. If Habitat for Humanity could borrow at the same rate it lends (0%) it could eliminate poverty housing. How could the COB partner with low and very low income home ownership organizations to provide loans or subsidies that would equate to a borrowing rate of 0%? (John Moon)

18. What is the City of Bellingham doing to help working families get into homeownership? (Kristin Johnson)

The following seven questions submitted by the York Neighborhood Association Board:

19. How can the City intervene to stop the conversion of single-family homes into illegal rooming houses? In York, houses are rented out to groups of individuals in violation of the single-family zoning. This allows landlords to raise the rents above what a working family can afford. Only groups of single adults (usually students with parental financial support) can afford these exorbitant rents. Lack of zoning enforcement means our neighborhood has been detrimentally changed so that the majority of residents are now transient students who only live here for a year or two.

Here are just a few recent advertised examples of apparent violations:

- 1215 Humboldt St., \$3,995 advertised as 7 bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- 1312 Franklin St., \$3,150 advertised as 6 bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- Gladstone St., \$2,500 advertised as 5 bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- 1314 Humboldt St., \$2,400 advertised as 4+ bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- 1730 Humboldt St., \$3,000 advertised as 4+ bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- 1409 Iron St., \$2,995 advertised as 4 bedrooms; single-family zoning.
- 300 block of Potter St., \$3,000 advertised for 6 renters; single-family zoning.
- 1724 James St., advertised as “rooms for rent; \$450/room”; single-family zoning.

20. Will the City enforce already existing housing regulations to prevent landlords from violating single-family zoning codes? We believe that if the "rule of three" is enforced, landlords will not be successful at charging outrageous rents. Rather than turn a blind eye to these blatant violations of housing codes, the City needs to get tough and enforce the codes. If existing rules are enforced, the prices will have to come down.

21. Because individuals are afraid to file Code Enforcement Complaints (to identify illegal use of homes as rooming houses or illegal ADU units) can the York Neighborhood Association be allowed to file the complaints? We are told the City does not have enough staff to do the initial investigation to identify illegal uses. Because the residents of the neighborhood are aware of which addresses are in violation, we should be able to bring these as official complaints to the City, who would then initiate the investigation. We are willing to begin the "leg work" to get this started.

22. How will the City increase its enforcement programs? We believe regulations already exist that will help reduce the high cost of rental houses by simply enforcing the rules. Landlords will have to reduce the rents because they can no longer rent to groups of adults or charge a per-bedroom fee, set up sleeping rooms in dining rooms, basements, and attics.

23. Question #5: How is the City working with WWU to educate its students about their responsibility to NOT participate in violation of the existing housing laws? Is the City and WWU encouraging students to be good citizens and not participate in the landlords' scheme to violate single-family zoning laws? If the city is planning to subsidize educational materials about tenant rights, it should also explain what the law is on the number of allowed tenants in single-family zoned neighborhoods.

24. How does the City plan to safeguard the character of single-family neighborhoods, as mandated by the Growth Management Act? The City's recent efforts to update the Comprehensive Plan are mandated by the State's Growth Management Act, which also requires the municipalities to respect and preserve the character of existing neighborhoods. However, due to the pressure of rising rents and housing costs, the York Neighborhood is showing signs of becoming a transitional zone, characterized by a large population of transients living in unregulated (and frequently unsafe) rental housing (approximately 54%) rather than the cohesive community of families of all kinds who call the York Neighborhood "home" rather than just "where I live now."

25. Does the city have any plans for learning from the ways other municipalities are addressing the need for affordable housing?

26. Why doesn't the City of Bellingham become a builder and landlord to affordable housing?
(Carole Jacobson)

27. Can you consider a requirement for developing a multi-unit housing project that at least 10% of the units must be affordable and remain so for an extended period of time? (Ray Dellecker)

28. Why would legal counsel for the City suggest (at the Comp Plan Hearing on the Merits) that the cost of development falls to the developer when the GMA specifically mandates that is a responsibility of the local government? This speaks to the difference between on-site improvements (the developers' job) and capital facilities (mandated as a city responsibility). (Linda Twitchell)

29. Why can't currently empty buildings such as the former Albertson's building at the Saint Joseph south building be purchased and converted to housing? (Lindsay McDonald)

30. What is the likelihood of allowing for increased density through permitting accessory standalone living quarter structures (studio size, mother-in-law) on a single lot. This would ease tight rental market and give property owners additional passive income potential. (Jed Ballew)

31. Please update the community on any developments to the City's ADU ordinance, including detached ADUs. (Christy Nieto)

32. I am writing to express my support for a citywide ordinance that bans Source of Income Discrimination for renters. I am very excited that you are finally pursuing this. As an aside, I am a homeowner in the Fountain District Urban Village neighborhood and have received two notifications from the City in the last month stating that my neighbors will be adding legal ADUs to their property. I couldn't be more delighted. I would love for one of my friends to be able to afford to live in my neighborhood in an ADU, near my house. Bring them on. (Janet Marino)